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Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by International Shinto Foundation (ISF), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Social inclusion is the act of making all groups of people, especially the underprivileged, handicapped and marginalized, within a society feel valued. While there are certain people who will surely be saved and relieved by ordinary social inclusive activities, there are some who are hardly recognized and attended by usual social inclusion programs. There are those who have difficulties, sickness and troubles that are invisible or not easily recognized, such as, typically, brain higher-order functional disorder or developmental disorder. Such groups of people are often bullied and kept away from other people because of their behavior that seem strange to or unharmonious with other people, resulting in quitting their study or job to become hermits.

Another typically ignored group is young girls who ran away from home because of child or sexual abuse in their family etc. and are unwillingly forced to work in the, often illegal, lowest sex industry to survive out of economic necessity. They have actually lost connection to society, and there are very few or no people they can turn to or options they can resort to get out of such miserable situation.

It means that, for example, if a woman is writhing in agony on a road side, then many bystanders would try to help her. But if that woman pretends to be okay trying to keep her countenance in spite of actually suffering severe pain, then people will pass over. Even if the both have the same level of difficulties, the former are taken care while the latter are ignored and left behind. There are very few people who would try to give hands out to those invisibly suffering people, as it requires special knowledge and experiences to understand their feeling, emphasize with and approach to them for being effectively and surely able to care and make them get out of such circumstances. Governments and authorities should pay more attention to and consider specific method to salvage them. For people with brain higher-order functional disorder, for example, loneliness would often have seriously negative, even fatal influence beyond healthy people's imagination, leading to extreme poverty etc. But it should be noted that everyone has, more or less, some risk to fall in such a terrible situation. It is not other's business. For understanding it as a sensitivity to others' feeling would be indispensable. People are generally insensitive to not-easy-to-recognize or invisible things.

Then why are such people left behind? The first and most influential factor would probably be insufficient funds to be invested for countering such issues. For example, children who have grown in terrible anxiety and stress because of abuse or traumatic experiences tend to have accumulated nervous fatigue, leading to lack of recognizing judgment and concentration. The most necessary treatment for such children would be medical care by experts rather than support to study or work with other normal students or colleagues. Lack of available funds has impeded to invest in developing specific programs and expert personnel aimed at attending such children.

For this end, the income redistribution system needs to be reformed as a central program for social inclusion. After all, it would seem desirable to adopt progressive taxation that not only wealthy people, but also middle-income people are involved to contribute to fund for that purpose. Secure and prosperous society cannot be built unless minimum income necessary for basic human cultural life is secured for everyone. In other words, progressive taxation is beneficial not only for the underprivileged, but for the privileged too. In northern European countries like Sweden, for the purpose of avoiding middle-income people from feeling too much burden, support for underprivileged people are carried out through public services rather than cash grants, while the taxation is transferred to weigh in general consumption tax. Thus, they succeeded in smoothly expanding the funds and expenses

for underprivileged people. In this way they succeeded in meeting the needs of and thoroughly take care of the marginalized and excluded people with difficulties in social participation.

It would also be important and necessary, meanwhile, that young and working people actually feel and understand the benefits they get from social life security through child support and job support, so that they can be convinced that dedication to social security funds source is not only their burden, but also that they will eventually be rewarded as well.

Further, it is necessary to build a participation-type society. So long as one has workable mind/body and intention, he/she can get a waged job, and they pay taxes and insurance fee. For this end, it is required to prepare a system to flexibly cope with people's health, family circumstances etc.

Now Japan and many other nations face an era of serious lack of productive population and labor power due to few-children and many-aged people trend. Nevertheless, domestic individual financial assets are concentrated in very few, particularly elder people. Social welfare tends to be biased toward caring welfare for aged people and barely for children and women and other vulnerable people. Reduction in the productive population is nothing more than a degeneration of national power. It is now impossible to provide sufficient life security to all people with conventional social systems that were designed with typical and stereotyped life course.

Inequality in life can be minimized only through building a society where everyone can happily live and coexist regardless of their handicaps, gender, age or nationality.